

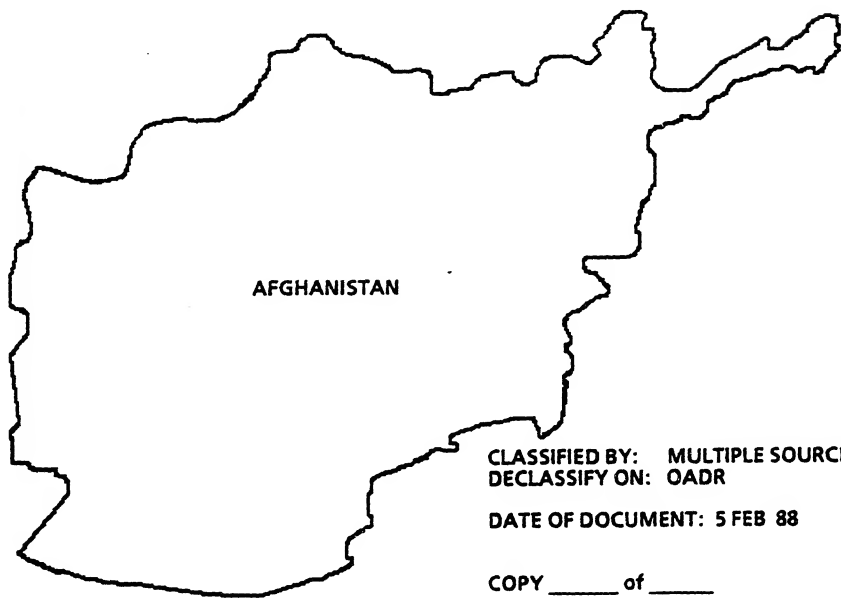
AFGHANISTAN



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SOVIET SOLDIER IN AFGHANISTAN



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SOVIET SOLDIER IN AFGHANISTAN

FOREWORD

(U) "It's not the gun that kills, it's the man behind the gun," is a statement that is frequently heard in the firearms debate. This statement is surely true in warfare at any level of intensity. No matter how modern, technologically advanced, or numerous a nation's weapons of war; their effectiveness rests solely in the hands of the individual soldier using the weapon or weapon system. History is replete with examples of individual courage, determination and effort emerging triumphant against a better equipped and numerically superior opposition. For these reasons an examination of individual performance and its potential effect on mission accomplishment is a worthy endeavor. This paper examines the Soviet soldier's performance in Afghanistan. It will seek to identify the positive and negative influences of training, discipline, leadership and morale on his performance. Conclusions will be made based on those factors as well as identifiable performance. Military tactics are not included in the scope of this endeavor. Nor is unit performance a topic, although certain units may be identified as a result of collective individual performance. Units and special groups (mechanics, engineers, drivers, etc.), are identified only as necessary to detail individual soldier performance.

(U) This study is not intended to teach military science or political history. Nor is it intended to be an absolute judgement

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of the Soviet soldier's performance or an all encompassing picture of the factors that affect that performance. Instead, it will look at what the Soviets say they expect from their military and contrast this to actual performance. A general or overall view of performance is presented rather than merely itemizing numerous incidents or detailing specific events.

INTRODUCTION (U)

(U) The Soviet 40th Army has recently completed eight years in Afghanistan. The Soviet military has taken advantage of this opportunity to employ and test new weapons and equipment. Modifications have been made to weapons, equipment and tactics in response to operational requirements. Additionally, Soviet officers are gaining valuable combat experience. And yet, the Soviet military is barely able to maintain the status quo. There are two reasons for this; first, the Mujahedin have proved to be far more resourceful, determined and numerous than expected, and secondly, the Soviet soldier's level of performance has been poorer than anticipated.

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THE SOVIET SOLDIER: WHO IS HE? (U)

(U) The USSR's Law of Universal Military Service of 1967 obligates all Soviet males to serve in the military upon reaching eighteen years of age. The current obligation is two years for the army and three years for the navy. Deferments are granted for going on to higher education, medical reasons and various family related hardships. At first glance, this law appears to be fair. It establishes the requirement for service, defines reasons for deferment or exemption, and provides sufficient personnel to meet the military force structure requirements. However, the implementation of the law is quite different from its apparent intent.

(U) Multiple sources indicate that there is a sizable segment of draft age males who try to avoid compliance with the law. The deferment and exemption provisions of that law are often abused and sometimes fraudulently used. Additionally, family connections, bribes of military officials, or simply not reporting when called up are frequent devices to escape conscription. While the scope and the impact of draft dodging in the Soviet Union is subject to debate, it is at least wide-spread enough to receive attention in several recent Soviet military and civilian publications. Given the estimated size of the pool of eligible males in the Soviet Union and the projected requirements of the current military force very little and probably no, adverse impact on manning the military should be anticipated. Indeed, some analysts believe that the military only needs to

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draft one-half of the eligible males to meet current manning requirements.

(U) Therefore, what is significant is that conscription avoidance suggests a sizable number of conscript-eligible males view military service as distasteful, interruptive and avoidable. It further suggests that many parents and family members concur with, if not actually participate in, non-compliance with the law. It also suggests that there are many members of the armed services who, unable to avoid the draft, are dissatisfied with military service and are simply trying to make the best of a distasteful situation.

(U) The overwhelming majority of Soviet officers are acquired from the various military academies, with a small number recruited from civilian academies and specialized schools. Though at times spot shortages of officer recruits have been reported, it appears there is no shortage of applicants for entrance to the military academies and subsequent appointment to the officer ranks. The benefits derived from the technical training received at higher institutions, combined with the substantially higher standard of living and special privileges, are guarantees this trend will continue. Viktor Suvorov describes why men become officers in his book, Inside the Soviet Army. He compares the Soviet Union to a "prison" with the entire society as "in prison" and the populace at large the "prisoners". The Armed Services are the "guards". Even though the "guards" are closely supervised and carefully controlled, their officers have

more freedoms than the "prisoners". Therefore, if one had a choice, one would logically choose to be an officer in the "guard" and escape the drudgery of life as a "prisoner."

THE TRAINING OF THE SOVIET FIGHTING MAN (U)

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(U) Although the period of basic training is very short, it is somewhat compensated for by the training Soviet youths receive in civilian schools and clubs prior to induction through the Voluntary Society for Cooperation With the Army, Air Force and Navy (DOSAAF). DOSAAF provides courses in basic military skills such as weapons familiarization and marksmanship, vehicle driving and repair, flying, skydiving and technical skills useful to the military. DOSAAF training begins as early as age fourteen for a period of three to four years. Reserve officers constitute the majority of instructors assigned to teach military subjects in this program.

(U) On the surface, the Soviet system of augmenting a very short and rudimentary basic military training period with DOSAAF appears sound. The DOSAAF system provides recruiting centers for military academies, basic military training and indoctrination to the fifty percent not drafted into the active military, and a core of reserve military officers active in both the military and the civil community. However, a closer look reveals a number of defects that singly are not too serious, but together work to the detriment of the Soviet soldier. First and foremost, a good portion of time and effort is devoted to political indoctrination, civil defense, and technical training for civil occupations. Secondly, the Soviet Military has influence only in the conduct of subjects directly related to preinduction military training. The local civil administrator actually schedules classes and allocates training resources. Friction between the

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military instructor and the civil administrators are commonplace. As a result, the quality and quantity of preinduction training is suspect at best

(U) The total training package of pre-induction, basic and unit training produces a Soviet soldier that is adequate to meet

minimum military standards. He is physically fit and capable of performing the simple roles and tasks assigned him and of operating the simple equipment he is provided. His performance in Afghanistan is a reflection of that mediocre training. In fact, there is evidence that the lack of proper training, absence of foreign mercenaries, and reality of the combat situation in Afghanistan have been major contributors to morale and discipline problems.

The Morale and Discipline of the Soviet Soldier in Afghanistan
(U)

(U) Leadership, or the lack thereof, also plays a vital role in the poor performance of Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan. The Soviet officer corps has the grudging respect, and occasionally the admiration, of the individual soldier. However, this is attributable to the esteem the soldier has for the higher educational level of the officers; the envy of officers' political power and standard of living; and the fear of the officer's complete control over their lives. It is not because the officers have demonstrated any "leadership" qualities, shown any concern for the soldier, provided for the general welfare of the soldier,

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nor attempted to improve the soldier's "lot in life".

THE LEADERSHIP OF THE SOVIET SOLDIER IN AFGHANISTAN (U)

(U) The Armed Forces of the Soviet State: A Soviet View, written by Marshal A. A. Grechko, provides authoritative insight on the Soviet expectation of its officer corps. Marshal Grechko writes: "The Soviet officer is primarily a Soviet leader and Soviet specialist." He notes that approximately 90 percent of all officers are members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and Komsomol with membership becoming nearly 100 percent of brigade commanders and above. Marshal Grechko states that the general and specific requirements of an officer can be reduced to six basic principles. These principles are quoted here, in excerpt form, without the accompanying detailed explanation. He writes: (Bold face type appears as it does in the original text.)

(U) "Above all, it is **communist conviction and utter dedication to the Party and people**. The Soviet officer is an active conductor of Party policy. He is called upon to disseminate its ideas among the ranks, to conduct political work tirelessly, to present regular talks and reports, and conduct political classes resourcefully and meaningfully. He must be a model of honest and conscientious service to the Motherland."

(U) "The second requirement is **high discipline and execution**. Self-composure, a readiness and capability to carry out the order of a senior accurately and in a timely manner, honesty and

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truthfulness are those qualities without which a Soviet officer could not work at all in peacetime, let alone in wartime."

(U) "The third requirement is initiative and independence. These qualities are obligatory for any person, especially an officer. Any battle invariably demands independent actions and decisions of him. Without initiative victory cannot be achieved."

(U) "The fourth requirement is a commander's will and organizational abilities. Under the complex conditions of war, firmness in decisions and actions, the ability of a commander or supervisor to organize and subordinate people to his will and direct them to perform a combat mission under difficult circumstances is of primary importance."

(U) "The fifth requirement is high professional training and general and military-technical culture of officer cadres. The profound changes taking place in military affairs, the high general educational level of youth being called into the Armed Forces and the need to master complex equipment and weapons in short time periods demand that every officer have a large reserve of general scientific, military and ideological-theoretical knowledge, that he firmly knows the principles of conducting a battle or operation and the design and use of combat equipment and weapons, and that he employ them intelligently,"

(U) "And the sixth requirement is the ability to train and educate subordinates. The Motherland entrusts the officer with

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that which is most dear and valuable in our country--people, the remarkable Soviet youth, which he is obliged to educate and train, and, in severe time of war, to lead into battle. Therefore, instilling in officers the proper methods for working with people and educating them comprises one of the most important tasks. The officer will only successfully handle his diverse duties if he masters Marxist-Leninist methodology, and has a firm knowledge of the principles and methods of political and military education and the principles of military pedagogy and psychology, approaches each subordinate skillfully with consideration for his personal features, organizes classes and exercises in a methodologically intelligent and instructive manner and conducts them on a high level in conformity with the requirements of military art."

(U) These quotes from Marshal Grechko are representative of the basic themes that appear in literally thousands of Soviet military writings. This book, as well as others, goes into great detail describing the required traits of the Soviet officer. In all of them, the first requirement is always complete faith and allegiance to the CPSU. The second requirement is consistently the immediate and unquestioning obedience to superiors. Since The Great Patriotic War, no one has attained General Officer status without having established his bona fides as a true and obedient servant of the Party. The importance assigned these requirements leave no doubt that the Soviet officer is considered by the CPSU as the "backbone" of the military forces. He is the framework on which the entire military organization is built.

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(U) Some of these military writers even define in minute detail requirements for officers to be compassionate and understanding of their soldiers, to show concern for their general welfare and that of their families, to visit their sick soldiers in the hospital, and to provide adequate mess, quarters and clothing. How then do the Soviet officers measure-up to these established requirements and standards? The answer to this question is mixed.

(U) Without question, the "successful" Soviet officer scrupulously "parrots" the official party line and unhesitatingly obeys the orders of his superiors. He expects his subordinates to do the same, nothing more and nothing less. To do otherwise would, at best, doom his military career and result in his disgraceful return to the drudgery of the civil sector. At worst, he will be ruthlessly eliminated. This does not mean that the officer completely fulfills the established requirements, for he does not. It simply means that he works very hard to at least give the appearance of full compliance. In order to accomplish this goal, the other requirements are necessarily stifled. An officer will not take any innovative and independent action that has even a remote possibility of drawing the attention and ire of his superiors and the Party. In Afghanistan, independent and innovative actions (at the maneuver level) necessary to successfully engage the Mujahedin are almost non-existent. What remains then is a Soviet officer that "toes the mark" and is technically proficient, but lacks the essential motivation and practical skills necessary to fully satisfy the established Soviet officer requirements. Additionally, the Soviet officer is

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a reflection of the bureaucratic establishment and the society in general. Therefore, the same instances of corruption, bribery and deceit are found, and sometimes abound because the officer answers only to the Party and his superiors. Even with these problems and shortcomings of the officer corps, the Soviet officer is the "backbone" of the Soviet military and given the proper motivation and latitude he has the technical skills to become a formidable battlefield opponent.

(U) If the Soviet officer is the "backbone" of the Soviet military, a look at the non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps and its leadership role is also necessary. Within the Soviet Army, the weakest link in the chain of command is the non-commissioned officer. The absence of NCO leadership can be directly attributed to a lack of experience. Unlike most western armies the Soviets select their NCO's directly from basic training rather than from a system where career soldiers advance based on time in grade, performance record and advanced training. Viktor Suvorov states that the selection process is quite haphazard because there is no merit selection. During induction one group of soldiers is assigned to a regular division and another to a training division for sergeants. Often, the selection is based solely on quotas, ethnic factors and the requirements for NCO's in a particular Soviet State. (This last factor is based on the projected need for NCO's in reserve components of a state once the soldier is demobilized)

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J) Captain Joesph Tulbane, in his article, "The Soviet NCO, The Weak Link", Military Review, April, 1983, discusses many of the shortcomings and their underlying reasons. He divides the factors that contribute to the low status and lack of professionalism of the Soviet NCO into three categories.

- Relations with unit officers.
- Relations with the older "short timers"
- Relations with contemporaries

It appears from this article, and from Soviet military writings that junior officers micro-manage to a point of actually doing the NCO's duty, even on a day to day basis because the officers believe their advancement is totally dependent on a mistake free performance. This lack of trust produces a NCO who is hesitant to make decisions and unwilling to take any initiative. In his relationships with the junior enlisted, the NCO finds himself in a position of leadership over troops who in many cases have more time in service than himself. This is further exacerbated by the underground class system within the military that gives the second year soldier complete and total control over first year troops. As far as the NCO's relationship with his contemporaries, it appears that because of the lack of a professional corps of sergeants, there is very little positive interaction. As a result, the reenlistment rate among NCO's is very low.

CONCLUSIONS (U)

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